HOW DARDANELLES FAILURE AFFECTS BALKAN DIPLOMACY

Undertaken in Part to Draw Bulgaria and Greece Into the War.

Did Serve to Cheer Russia and Helped Win Italian Support.

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Given the German fondness for the historical parallel, it is odd that they have not insisted upon the striking resemblance of the great British adventure at the Dardanelles to that equally great and wholly fatal Athenian expedition to Syracuse, which, in the end, was the cause of the downfall of a great sea power, at grips with Sparta, yet risking all in a campaign far away from the main field of operations. Like all parallels the Syracusan falls down when pushed too far, for while Sir Ian Hamilton makes a fair Nicias, Winston Churchill will hardly do for Alcibiades, but there must be mournful likenesses for every Briton.

In reviewing the progress of this great overseas campaign of the British it is necessary to examine it from three separate standpoints—from that of higher politics, imperial and international; from that of the local political situation in the near east; finally, from that of the actual operations on Gallipoli peninsula. Only thus is it possible to estimate the plus and minus of this tremendous venture.

The Imperial Aspect.

In going to the Dardanelles, first with a fleet and then with an army, Great Britain served immediately her own imperial interests. When the first operation began a Turkish army, officered by Germans, had been lately repelled from the shores of Suez, but was still a threat to Egypt. The continued presence of a hostile army, which had penetrated the Egyptian frontier but a relatively short distance from the Nile, contributed to unrest in Egypt, compelled the British to consider always the possibility of religious disturbances, of native risings, of the double danger incident to external attack and internal revolt.

Suez was and remains the corner stone of the British empire. Could the Turks close this avenue of British imperial power India would in turn be partially isolated, British communication with the Australian colonies interrupted and delayed, the whole system of imperial relations disturbed. Turkish success in Egypt might light the flames of Moslem revolt in India as well; prestige, which means so much all over the east, would be lost.

An attack at the Dardanelles, a thrust directly at Constantinople, would infallibly recall all Turkish troops from the Suez region; it would remove the battle line from the marches of Egypt and contribute to insuring the continuance of order and peace in Cairo and Alexandria. If it did no more, if only the field of strife were transferred, the profit was plain. In addition, an opportunity would come to the British at the foot of the Persian gulf to begin operations there against Mesopotamia, which is the land gateway to India.

Plainly, then, the British had immediate profits in view to themselves in transferring the operations from the Sinai to the Gallipoli peninsula. Always, however, there was the qualification that defeat, disaster at the straits, would destroy their prestige in the near east, but the same was true of the Suez operation.

International Considerations.

Turning now to international considerations, it was necessary, first of all in the situation last spring, for Great Britain to give Russia an immediate evidence of loyalty and of moral and material support. No nation had made such sacrifices in men and resources to the allied cause as Russia, and the recent defeat at the Mazurian lakes was a final evidence of Russian sacrifice. What were her allies doing while Russia was thus suffering and laboring?

According to the Germans, nothing. But the main object of Russian ambitions for centuries had been the possession of Constantinople, and for more than a century the main obstacle had been Britain. Across the continent after the Mazurian disaster Sazonoff and Sir Edward Grey exchanged words which meant nothing unless they meant that Britain at last conceded to Russia the right to sit in power in Pera and Galata and restore the cross to Santa Sophia. Words, such words, needed the confirmation of acts; thus the fleets of the allied nations at the sea gate of Stamboul brought new enthusiasm to Russia, new devotion.

In addition, in the immediate military situation, they relieved the Russian armies in the Caucasus of the strain incident to an invasion by several Turkish army corps; they opened the way to Russian victory as Russian invasion of the Carpathians had paved the way for the Serbian triumph at Valievo. Thus to her necessary ally British effort at the Dardanelles gave an assurance that was required and an aid that was instantly effective and continuingly useful. It was at once a promise for the future realization of the greatest of Slav aspirations and a contribution to immediate Russian needs. It was not less welcome as a promise of munitions, lack of which was soon to cause the great summer reversal.

The Italian Factor.

In Rome, as in Petrograd, the Dardanelles was meant to have an influence which it did in fact exert. Italian aspiration, too, turns toward the near east. At the outset of the present war Italy finally decided to renounce her rivalry with France in the western Mediterranean and in the old Roman provinces of north Africa. To German promises of French African provinces Italy turned a deaf ear. But this left her bound to follow the course of Venice, since she had surrendered that of Rome. This path led straight to the Aegean.

Since the success of the Dardanelles expedition meant the downfall of Turkey and the fall of Turkey meant the partition of Turkish estate, Italy could only hope to realize her ambitions in the near east by becoming of right one of the heirs. To do this she had to enlist on the allied side. Failure to enlist meant that Russia, Great Britain and France would divide the Osmanli property, giving to Greece, the Italian rival, what they did not desire themselves and thus making Greece their soldier in the near east.

Finally, in taking Tripoli, Italy had acquired common interests and common perils with the allies. Turkish success in Egypt meant a prompt extension of Turkish activity to Lybia and the Cyrenaica. Already the Turkish holy war had borne fruit in the Tripolitan desert, if nowhere else, and the Senussi were astir.

More than all else, then, it was the Dardanelles expedition that persuaded Italy to cast her lot with the allies. She believed, wrongly as it seems, that Turkish collapse would be sudden and complete, that the degringolade of Lulu Burgas and the first Balkan war would be repeated. Failing quick rewards from Austria for continued neutrality, Italy made up her mind to take King George's shilling, as Sardinia had taken British service in the Crimean war. And the Austrian price was lacking.

Here, then, is a third solid gain: first, Egypt was temporarily at least saved from all Turkish menace; second, Russian confidence and loyalty were assured; third, Italy was enlisted; so much the Dardanelles operation accomplished in the opening days.

Politics in the Balkans.

The next step in the allied diplomatic campaign, which was based on the naval and military operations, was to enlist the Balkan states. Greece seemed certain to be had at the first moment. But promptly Greece asked that her own integrity be guaranteed by her prospective allies. This meant that the allies should publicly declare that Bulgaria could never hope to regain Cavala or Drama. Such a declaration would infallibly throw the Bulgar into the arms of the kaiser, and it was the Bulgar who held the land gate to Constantinople.

In addition, Greece insisted that Bulgaria should not receive from Serbia the lands west of the Vardar, which she claimed. Serbia, too, fighting bravely against Austria and typhus, protested that she should be permitted to hold what her soldiers had won in two wars and were defending gallantly in a third.

But the allies, determined to enlist Bulgaria, asked Greece to surrender Cavala against the promise of Smyrna; asked Serbia to give over half of Macedonia, against Bosnian futures, as well as to give over Dalmatian hopes to Italy. Serbia consented; Venizelos consented for Greece, but Constantine, loyal to the kaiser and perceiving national hostility to the surrender of Cavala, balked. Bulgaria, for her part, was coldly uncompromising; she must have all or she would, for the moment, remain neutral.

Athens meantime was frankly suspicious of Italy, which held the Island of Rhodes and a portion of the Aegean archipelago, whose people were Greek. It was also suspicious of Italian designs upon northern Epirus, also Hellenic by race, but marked out at London as a portion of that "autonomous" Albania which was the playground for Austrian and Italian ambitions.

Such was the situation in the Balkans—the political as contrasted with the military. The aim of the allies was to recreate the Balkan Confederation, reconcile the Balkan allies, who had quarreled and fought after their first victory, and throw against Turkey and Austria the full weight of these considerable armies if the naval operations proved alone insufficient to open the road to the Black sea and make possible the transportation to Russia of needed munitions.

The Turn of the Wheel.

From the inception of the plan, therefore, it was clear that, while Russia might be satisfied, Italy enlisted by mere preliminary operations, the tangle in the Balkans was such that only one thing could insure the enlisting of Greece and Bulgaria. This was success. Unfortunately, success was certain immediately only if Greece or Bulgaria came in, perhaps only if both enlisted. With the possessor of Byzantium Bulgaria would have to make terms. Greek sympathies, apart from the crown, were with the allies, but the crown could postpone Greek participation.

There was, then, plain the peril of the thing. If the allied fleets failed, then allied diplomacy would fail with them. There was not the smallest real chance to reconcile the rival Balkan states; each insisted upon all of his claims at the expense of all his neighbors. The influence of the courts of Athens and Sofia was against the allies. In victory alone was their chance of a solution of the problem of the near east.

And the turn of the wheel went against the allies. First, the fleet tried and failed. It is the belief of most military and naval experts that the failure was due to the attempting of the impossible. These experts hold that a fleet without an army cannot do what was asked of the Anglo-French fleet, but American naval and military officers insist that a little more perseverance and the straits would have been won. In this some British writers agree. As for Berlin, it insists that the Turkish ammunition was gone when the expedition gave up, and only retreat by the allies saved Byzantium.

In any event the fleet tried and failed. Several battleships were sunk by the Turks; the whole venture was abandoned; the fleets went back to Mudros to await the coming of land forces, and, as it turned out, that of German submarines. The Turks, warned of what was coming, went feverishly to work to fortify Gallipoli peninsula, and when the armies did come they were ready. Did the allies from the outset expect a Greek army to aid their fleets? Many believe this. Was the attack hurried by Russian request? This, too, is asserted. Such circumstances may explain the occasion, but they do not change the effect of the disaster.

In Athens and Sofia.

While the allies were preparing to try again the whole face of the war in Europe changed. In the west the disaster of the British at Ypres demonstrated that there was to be no allied "drive" for the spring. Hard on this came the beginning of that long Russian retreat that was to go from the banks of the Dunajec to the Beresina and from the outskirts of Cracow to those of Riga. The effect in the Balkans could not be exaggerated.

A good deal of rubbish, first and last, has been printed in this country about the lack of moral perception in the Balkans. But why should the states whose people have for decades been compelled to suffer untold agonies in consequence of the jealousies of the great powers, who were consigned to tender Turkish mercies for generations because Great Britain and Russia and Austria were at odds about Constantinople, cast aside all self-interest and risk existence because the allies believed themselves fighting for the right on this occasion? Why should the Bulgars forget British responsibility for the abrogation of the treaty of San Stefano, for example, or the Greeks overlook the long nightmare of Crete or the recent injury in northern Epirus?

What actually happened was that in the spring Athens and Sofia concluded that German victory was far from impossible. Russian reverses would not, however, affect the situation if a successful allied expedition should force the Dardanelles by occupying the Gallipoli peninsula. Still neutral and still ready to enlist on the winning side, the Balkans waited. But the Gallipoli land campaign promptly turned into a second failure. Instead of immediate victory, there was at best a deadlock, a complete check. All summer long, while German guns made new echoes before Warsaw and Brest-Litovsk and finally Vilna, while western allied armies stuck to their trenches, the Turks held on.

Now, the Greeks and the Bulgars have both in recent years defeated the Turks. It was an incomprehensible thing to them that great nations like Britain and France should fail where they had succeeded. Less than three years separate Bulgar and Greek victories from the allied failures against the Osmanli. Thus the situation in the minds of the Bulgars turned steadily in favor of the Teutons. Ferdinand hoped, but many of the advisers now believe, that the Austro-Germans were to win.

In Athens the sympathy of the whole public was with the allies. Venizelos was not shaken in his confidence of ultimate allied success by the long succession of allied defeats, but the king not only hoped but believed, believed unhesitatingly, that Germany would win.

In this situation Germany suddenly offered to Bulgaria all that she hoped for—Macedonia, Cavala and Drama, which were Greek, but for which Greece was to be paid by Albanian gains; she persuaded Turkey to resign a part of Thrace and promised more; she promised Mackensen and a victorious German army to cut the road through Serbia to Sofia; she dangled before Ferdinand the lure of Constantinople, before Bulgaria the hegomony of the Balkans. Ferdinand took the bait, Bulgaria mobilized and the end was in sight.

Again Venizelos strove to enlist Greece on the allied side. Again there seemed the certainty, as in the days when the fleet went to the Dardanelles, that a Greek army would fight for the allies at the crucial moment. But again Constantine intervened. Greece having mobilized, he ousted Venizelos. Greece would remain neutral. Relying on the promises of his brother-in-law, the kaiser, the Greek king fell back upon the old policy.

Had the allies possessed a large army to send at once to Saloniki could the Greeks have been able to feel that they would have been protected against danger and only required to attack their ancient enemy, Bulgaria. Constantine might have failed. But no such army was available. What was asked of Greece was in sum what had been asked of Belgium, what was now asked of Serbia, to hold on until distant armies could come.

Greece, to be sure, was bound to Serbia by treaty to help her against Bulgaria; so was Rumania; but here was the need to help the Serb, not against Bulgaria, but against Bulgaria with Germany, Austria and Turkey thrown in. Venizelos believed that it was the wiser policy to keep the faith, but the allies had no armies to give his policy force. Greek sympathy did not go to the length of dethroning a king whose caution might arise from Teutonic sympathy, but was solidly founded on patent national interests. Thus it was that allied diplomacy in the Balkans having shipwrecked in consequence of allied defeat in the field, Bulgaria enlisted and Greece stayed neutral.

Military and Naval.

It now remains to summarize briefly the history of the military and naval operations. The naval attack began in February and terminated after the sinking of the Bouvet, Ocean and Irresistible, March 18. It was not until April 25 the first troops of the expeditionary army began to land on the Gallipoli peninsula. This promontory is perhaps fifty miles long, extending westward from the European mainland, with the Dardanelles straits to the south and the Gulf of Saros to the north. In his first report Sir Ian Hamilton compared it to a well worn boot, and this figure makes it easy to describe both the main features of the battlefield and the progress of the conflict itself.

Thus, the toe of the boot is the western end of the peninsula, the extreme point of which is Cape Hellas, and the notable feature is the town of Sedul Bahr, the site of the Turkish forts commanding the entrance to the straits and the scene of the first fighting.

Eastward from Sedul Bahr, along the sole of the boot to the heel, is slightly less than ten miles, and exactly at the heel is the narrow point in the Dardanelles, commanded by a cluster of Turkish forts on the Gallipoli peninsula and faced by others on the Asiatic shore.

On the north shore of the peninsula, at the ankle, is a curving bay—beginning at the hill of Gaba Tepe and ending at Suvla bay—a stretch of three or four miles, dominated by the ridge of Sari Bahr, some 900 feet over the Gulf of Saros. From Cape Hellas to Suvla bay is perhaps twelve miles. At Gaba Tepe, the ankle, the Gallipoli peninsula is about five miles wide; at the toe, between Sedul Bahr and Cape Hellas, less than two.

The objective of the allied forces was the cluster of forts just under the heel, above the village of Klild Bahr. To reach this two ways were open. Troops could be landed along the shore of the ankle from Gaba Tepe to Suvla bay. They could also be landed at the toe from Cape Hellas to Sedul Bahr, and just under the toe at Merto bay—the best landing place of all, but under fire from Turkish batteries on the Asiatic shore near the site of Troy. East of Cape Hellas as far as Gaba Tepe the character of the coast was such as to make landing operations difficult, and an effort here ended in relative failure.

The first problem of Sir Ian Hamilton was to get his troops ashore, and he was obliged to make a general attempt—that is, to fling his forces at every available landing place at once—in order to avoid the destruction of each separate landing party by the Turks, who could easily concentrate overwhelming numbers at any threatened point. The landing cost 15,000 British casualties—that is, a number equal to the whole of the first American expedition to Santiago in 1898.

The landing was made mainly at the toe from Cape Hellas to Sedul Bahr. Meantime the French landed on the Asiatic side, near the site of Troy, and for the moment so engaged the Asiatic batteries that Merto bay was occupied. At the same time other parties were put ashore at the ankle, above Gaba Tepe, and below it on the instep, east of Cape Hellas and Gaba Tepe. But these two landing parties were instantly checked, and until the last few days could make no progress whatever. Once the main force was ashore it moved up the toe of the boot, stretching a line straight across the peninsula. But after having progressed for some three miles it reached the first strong defensive position, that of Achi Baba. Here a line of hills stretches straight across the peninsula, rising abruptly from the Gulf of Sares to an elevation of 400 feet, and from the straits to 500 feet. Midway across the peninsula and just east of the village of Krithia is the dominating hill of Achi Baba, 700 feet high. Against this position the allied forces moved on the first day after they landed, but they were halted there, and have been unable to make any substantial progress.

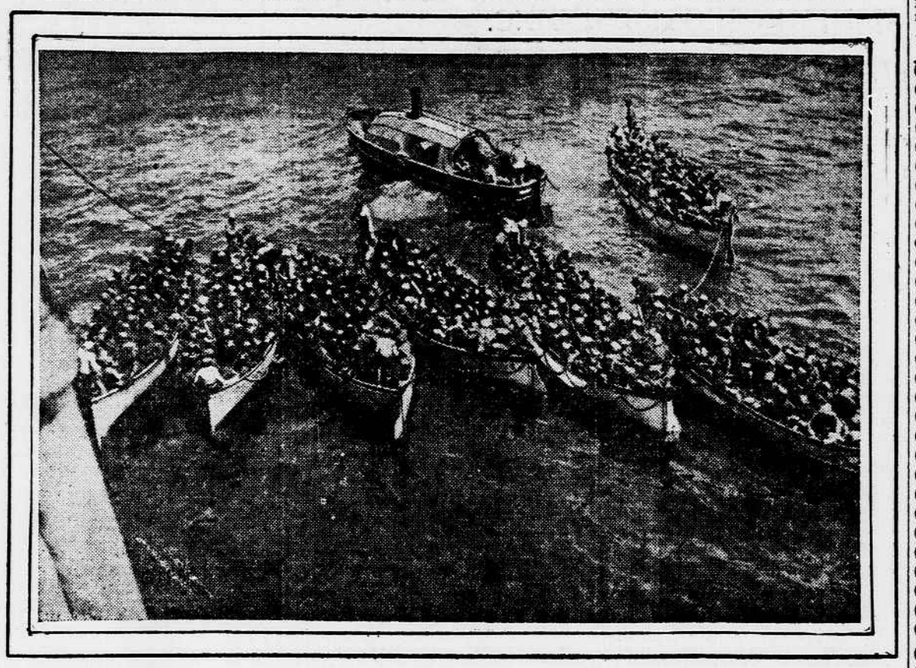
Meantime a second force landed above Gaba Tepe was designed to move south across the instep, thus arriving in the rear of the Achi Baba position and compelling the Turks to retire from it. But this force was no less promptly checked along the face of the Sari Bahr hill.

The third and last attack was made north of Sari Bahr, the landing taking place in the broad roadstead between Suvla Cape and the seaward slopes of Sari Bahr. The object was to seize the ridge of hills extending from Sari Bahr northeastward to the Gulf of Saros, marked on the map Hanafart and known in the reports by the name of Anafarta, to get hold of Sari Bahr and flow over the whole range down upon the roadway at the feet, which is the only landward line of communications of the Turks on the peninsula.

More than 100,000 men were used in this attack; it was momentarily successful; Sari Bahr, the key of the peninsula, was occupied, but the Turks retook it, and continued to hold a portion of the crests of the Anafarta range. This operation took place in the middle of August. It lasted several days, but after terrific slaughter ended in a new check. And with the check the Dardanelles campaign fell to a deadlock. By October 1 it had cost the British alone more than 100,000 casualties. The French loss is not known. For this enormous slaughter there was nothing to show except a few square miles of ground, some trenches huddled under the crests of the hills, which the Turks still hold, a precarious position, destitute of safe sea bases.

Had the British been able to hold Sari Bahr they would have won the campaign. Had they been able to push on after the first landing, they would probably have carried Achi Baba, still lightly held by the Turk. Twice success has just slipped through their fingers. Only military men can guess now whether the successor to Sir Ian Hamilton, who has been recalled, will be asked to try again or commissioned to withdraw his army from its perilous post and take it to the mainland. This will be an operation fraught with incalculable peril. But so far as it is possible to see now, the military operations, from the purely military aspect, have been a complete failure, and they have been responsible for the equally grave collapse of allied diplomacy in the Balkans.

ARRIVAL OF BRITISH RELIEF EXPEDITION AT SALONIKI.



According to information made public in England, 13,000 British troops were landed at Saloniki, Greece, several weeks ago as the first division of a British army which will aid the Serbians in the defense of their country and in preventing the shipment through Serbia and Bulgaria of munitions for the Turks. This photograph, the first to reach America, shows the arrival of the first British relief expedition at Saloniki. These men are now fighting in Serbia. The boats have just left the transport on their way to the Saloniki landing.

Never in his long history has the Turk done better than at Gallipoli. Nothing has been more marvelous in military records than the Osmanli recovery between 1912 and 1915. Fighting on the very place through which he marched into Europe five centuries and a half ago, fighting with the devotion that made Plevna memorable in the last century, he has won the admiration of the whole world, of his British foes first.